

VIDEO

FAQ

Q What are the advantages of hard disk and memory card-based camcorders over older tape and DVD models?

A MiniDV tapes hold 60 minutes of high-quality footage and use simple video compression, which makes the results easier to edit. You can re-use them numerous times if you wish, or keep them as a permanent backup. However, capturing footage to your PC for editing is time consuming.

The 8cm DVD-Rs used in DVD camcorders store only 20 minutes of high-quality footage, but you can flick to favourite clips for playback by selecting thumbnails on the camcorder's LCD, rather than having to wind through a tape. They are also cheap, and most DVD players can play them.

Most hard disk camcorders can record hours of footage, and you can select clips as you would on a DVD. Transferring video to a PC is as simple as dragging and dropping files.

Memory cards are cheap and easy to use with your PC, but their smaller capacity means you may want to carry a few of them. With these last two formats it's vital that you back up any irreplaceable footage, just in case the worst happens.

Seth Barton

Video and games expert

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PANASONIC SDR-S10

★★★★★

£260 inc VAT

With the cost of memory cards falling, camcorders that use them for storage are becoming more attractive, particularly as they can be smaller than DV-based cameras. Panasonic's SDR-S10 is one of the smallest and most attractive camcorders we've seen.

The SDR-S10 is the most stylish camcorder ever to grace the pages of *Shopper*. The design is incredibly minimalist, with a simple shape that's unspoiled by the controls, which have been kept to a minimum. It's also very compact, measuring just 31x63x114mm, so it slips easily into a pocket or handbag. It comes without a lens cap or case, though, so you'll need to buy a camera pouch if you want to keep it looking pristine.

Despite its glamorous appearance the SDR-S10 is surprisingly robust. It is shock resistant and should survive a fall of up to 1.2m on to a hard surface. It's also water resistant, and suffers no ill effects from splashes, although it won't work underwater like Sanyo's Xacti (*What's New*, *Shopper* October 2007).

It's as easy to use as it is good looking. All you really need is the zoom control on the top and the record button on the back. There are few settings to play with, and none that really needs

adjusting, plus a small joypad that makes navigating the menus easy. The 2.7in LCD has 123,000 pixels, which is the same size and level of detail we've seen on camcorders twice its size.

The SDR-S10 records video to either SD or SDHC memory cards. A 2GB SD card is included with the camcorder. You can adjust the quality of recorded video using the LP, SP and XP presets. This sets the level of video compression used for the MPEG2 codec. In LP mode you



can capture 100 minutes of poor-quality footage; SP mode is good enough for most uses and will fit roughly 50 minutes on a 2GB card; and XP mode is more suitable for darker conditions or scenes with lots of movement, but you'll get only 25 minutes on a 2GB card. It's a pity Panasonic didn't opt for a more efficient codec, such as MPEG4.

This camcorder uses a 1/4in CCD sensor like most budget MiniDV and DVD camcorders. Video quality is acceptable, but footage can seem a little gloomy and some of the detail we usually see in our test subjects was lost even at the XP quality setting. It's on a par with most budget DVD camcorders, although certainly not as good as the best of them. If you plan to upload the results to the internet, it's fine, but you will notice the inferior picture quality compared with a similarly priced MiniDV camcorder if you view it on a large TV.

A splash-resistant door on the camcorder's base opens to reveal the card slot and a small battery. This lasted for 76 minutes of continuous recording in our tests, which is respectable for such a small camcorder. Also on the base is a screw-hole for attaching a tripod.

The SDR-S10 looks great and is not bad value when you consider the quality of its construction. We only wish the video quality were a little better.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Beautiful, compact design
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Less detail than from DV camcorders

HD CAMCORDER SD or SDHC storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/4in 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, composite and phono output, USB2 interface
PART CODE SDR-S10
SUPPLIER www.purelygadgets.co.uk
DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)

Battery life **76m**

Also consider...

SLING MEDIA Slingbox

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT



The Slingbox allows you to watch television anywhere in the world, as if you were sitting in your living room. It does this by streaming the video from your home over broadband, so you'll need an upload speed of at least 256Kbit/s. You can also use it on a home network and stream TV to a PC anywhere in your house using a wireless router.

It has SCART and S-video inputs, so you can plug in whichever set-top boxes you want. It also has a built-in Freeview tuner. It's simple to use, and even includes onscreen mock-ups of your remote controls.

This is a great product that's essential if you can't live without your TV.

VIDEO-STREAMING DEVICE SCART and S-video inputs, Freeview tuner, IR transmitter, 10/100 Ethernet port
PART CODE SB150-110
SUPPLIER www.currys.co.uk
DETAILS www.slingmedia.com
 ✓ Works well with set-top boxes; easy to set up ✗ Can't timeshift Freeview **FULL REVIEW** Sep 2006



CANON MD101

★★★★★

£149 inc VAT



The MD101 is a great camcorder, at an extremely low price. It has a widescreen LCD, which means that what you see on the screen is what you get on your TV.

Picture quality is excellent in good lighting conditions, with realistic colours and very little noise. Only the lack of a USB port is disappointing.



DV CAMERA MiniDV storage, 30x optical zoom, 1/4in 0.8-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, phono and composite output, FireWire interface
SUPPLIER www.dabs.com
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk
PART CODE 1881B007AA
 ✓ Decent image quality; good battery life ✗ No USB port **FULL REVIEW** Aug 2007

Battery life **100m**

JVC Everio GZ-HD7

★★★★

£997 inc VAT

We were very impressed with Canon's HV20 (see Also Consider... below), which is about the cheapest way to create your own High Definition (HD) footage. JVC's Everio GZ-HD7 isn't as cheap as the Canon, but it's a lot more serious looking and is aimed at anyone who wants to shoot a lot of high-quality footage.

The GZ-HD7 looks more like a professional camera than a consumer one. Its black finish, big lens and hood cover will make you feel like a serious filmmaker. It's longer and around 250g heavier than the HV20 but is more comfortable to hold. It feels as sturdy as it looks, which is a definite plus over the cheaper feel of the HV20.

All the best HD camcorders we've seen, including the HV20, use the HDV format. This has a 1,440x1,080 resolution, which is stretched to 1,920x1,080 for playback. The GZ-HD7 goes one better by recording video at the full 1,920x1,080 interlaced (1080i) resolution. However most HD TVs have a native resolution of only 1,360x768, so 1080i signals have to be downsampled before they can be displayed. To get the most from this camcorder's higher resolution, you'll need a 1,920x1,080 television.

Rather than using a single image sensor with a resolution high enough to generate such detailed video, JVC has opted for a three-CCD system. The CCDs are offset slightly from each other in the camcorder, and the three images are interpolated to create a single high-resolution image.



In theory this approach should work fine, but the results weren't as impressive as we'd hoped. Video isn't very sharp and has more noise than we saw with the HV20. There's also pronounced graininess. The GZ-HD7 is not very impressive in low light either, although the wide range of manual controls do at least let you compensate for this. The poor video quality can't be blamed on the video codec, as the GZ-HD7 uses the same MPEG2 codec as HDV camcorders, and at a higher bit-rate.

Video is stored on a built-in 60GB hard disk, allowing for around five hours of footage at the maximum 1080i resolution. This saves you from the hassle of changing tapes and capturing video to your PC in real time. Video is stored in a

proprietary .TOD file format, but we had no problem dragging and dropping it into Media Player Classic or Sony's Vegas editing software. The GZ-HD7 comes with a disc of software including CyberLink PowerDirector 5 Express.

There's plenty to admire about the GZ-HD7 including its big focus ring, excellent lens and simple exposure controls. Sadly, this pales into insignificance when you consider the HV20's superior video quality and lower price.

Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Full 1080i recording
- ✓ Hard disk storage
- ✗ Disappointing video quality

HD CAMCORDER 60GB hard disk storage, 10x optical zoom, 3x 1/2" 0.57-megapixel CCD, 2.8in LCD screen, HDMI, component, S-video, composite and phono output, USB2 and FireWire interfaces
PART CODE GZ-HD7EK
SUPPLIER www.pixmania.co.uk
DETAILS www.jvc.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



CHOOSING A... DV Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

CCD: 800,000 pixels
ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital
VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out
MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2 1/2" colour LCD
MEDIA: MiniDV tape
STILLS CAPTURE: 640x480 to tape
EXTRAS: Remote control
 Recommended minimum in grey

1 If you just want to make home movies, a digital video (DV) camera with the specs above will be fine and cost around £160. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD provides easy playback on location, while the remote control allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom specification. Check the battery life, which should preferably be 90 minutes or more, and consider budgeting for an extra battery.

2 To edit video, get a model that provides DV-in. You can transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies through the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video.

3 Enthusiasts will pay extra for a more flexible camera. Good manual focus and a colour viewfinder make for better camerawork, an external microphone transforms your audio and good battery and charger options keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic. For the best-quality video, look for a model with three CCDs. This gives more realistic colour reproduction and reduces picture noise to a minimum.

4 Miniature DV cameras, especially those that use tiny MicroMV tapes or memory cards, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality could be compromised. Cameras that replace tape with a hard disk or DVD are more useful, making your footage more manageable.

5 If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories. High Definition camcorders are available, and worth considering if you have an HD TV.

CANON HV20

★★★★★

£685 inc VAT



The HV20 is our favourite High Definition camcorder. It's affordable, but it doesn't sacrifice video quality. You'll get excellent-quality footage in almost any situation.

It's easy for beginners to use and has enough manual controls to capture the best images in trickier conditions. The HV20 stores its video footage to old-fashioned MiniDV tapes, but don't let that put you off this truly excellent camcorder.



HD CAMCORDER MiniDV storage, 10x optical zoom, 1/2" 2.96-megapixel CCD, 2.7in LCD screen, HDMI, component, composite and phono outputs, USB2 and FireWire interfaces **PART CODE** 2060B006AA
SUPPLIER www.purelygadgets.co.uk
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk
 ✓ Excellent picture quality; good battery life ✗ Poor zoom control
FULL REVIEW Oct 2007



TOP UP TV TUTV Anytime DTR

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

PRICE CUT!



This hard disk Freeview recorder

has twin tuners, so you can watch one programme while recording another. It also has a 160GB hard disk, which is enough to store more than 100 hours of recordings.

As well as the usual Freeview broadcasts, you can opt to receive additional Top Up TV programming downloaded to the hard disk for £10 a month. It's an inexpensive way of improving your TV viewing.



HARD DISK RECORDER 2x digital tuners, 160GB hard disk, RF input, RF output, 2x SCART, S-video, composite, stereo phono and coaxial S/PDIF output **SUPPLIER** www.topuptv.com
 ✓ Subscription service ready; no commitment to subscribe ✗ Awkward EPG **FULL REVIEW** Jul 2007